

CMS Style Guide • Midwest Region

Overview of this Document

This Content Management System (CMS) governance is provided as a guide for field station content providers and migrators as you write and edit content for the CMS website. It includes:

Introduction to Service Websites – An overview of the purpose, guiding principles, and location of the Service websites.

Content Standards – Guidelines that include understanding the audience, organizing content, consistency, clarity, tone, and voice.

Content Review Checklist – An abbreviated list of items used by field contacts and web managers to ensure content follows content standards.

Rule Sheet – Guidelines to help determine what content can and cannot be published to Service websites.

Introduction to the Service Websites

Purpose of the Service websites is to provide an engaging and effective user experience—easily navigated, an engaging look and feel, and driven by *subjects of interest for our visitors* rather than organizational structure.

Principles that govern our approach and support our vision of a subject-based website include:

- The website should improve the viewer’s experience.
- Information should be easy to locate and use.
- Information will be accurate and focused.

The objective is to provide content that is easily understood by all users yet does not obscure or change Service policy.

CMS Style Guide • Midwest Region

Content Standards

Understand Your Audience

Know your intended audience - what they want to know and what you need to tell them.

In general:

- Don't try to make one piece of web writing serve different audiences. Different audiences have different perspectives; address them separately.
- Explain everything. Don't assume your audience has knowledge that they may not have. This is particularly important when it comes to acronyms and topics that are common knowledge within your department and the Service but may not be to others.
- Make sure to have a clear understanding of what you are trying to accomplish on the website; write for a visitor's perspective.
- Be an advocate for your audience—anticipate their questions; lead them to related materials.

Content Organization and Consistency

Content should be organized using the following guidelines:

- Keep it short and sweet but also clear and thorough. Most visitors don't like to read on the screen; instead, visitors tend to scan web materials.
- Break up long pieces into short segments. Let your audience choose how much they want to read.
- Use headers and sub-headers, so visitors can get to the most critical sections.
- Lead strong. Put your most important information at the top of your page.
- Layer information by using brief introduction sentences or paragraphs that link to more in-depth information.
- Organize information in ways that make sense to the *audience*.
- Normally, limit yourself to one main idea per paragraph.
- Make sure content doesn't contradict other information on the website.
- Avoid duplication and redundancy, except where it's needed to address different audiences. This especially important when linking to content outside of your department's control - as you would never know when a broken link may result.
- Make sure that words and phrases mean the same thing throughout the page and the website. Be consistent with terminology, capitalization or proper nouns (for example, Service), voice, and point of view.

CMS Style Guide • Midwest Region

- Allow white space (blank areas) on your pages. White space provides eye relief, makes items easier to find, and creates a more attractive page.
- End complete sentences with a period. A period helps reader know when one thought stops and another begins.
- Incomplete sentences (such as ones used in subheadings) do not need to end with a period, unless they are within a paragraph.

Clarity of Purpose

General guidelines to make the purpose of your website clear include:

- State the purpose of any new web page on your website in the first paragraph. Do not assume that your visitor knows the purpose.
- Determine what the audience wants to know about the subject and what you need to tell them. Often, those are two different things - the audience wants to know things that fall outside your normal purview; you want to tell them things they wouldn't think to ask. Make sure the website anticipates both.

Tone and Voice

Strive to use plain language. Web content should be conversational, as if you were speaking to the person. See the Plainlanguage.gov website for helpful tips.

General guidelines to make the tone and voice of your web pages and website clear include:

- Avoid using professional jargon.
- If you must use an acronym, put it in parenthesis next to the proper term the first time it is used. Well-known acronyms, such as USA, need no explanation, but *when in doubt, spell it out*.
- For content that is read by a wide and varied audience, write to an elementary reading level. This is not meant to be condescending, but the reality is that simple, plain language is most effective for mass audiences.
- Write content for the web in second person creating the sense that your group is communicating directly with the user ("We'll show you how..."). This helps you focus on what the reader wants to know rather than what you want to say. This style of writing is more active and direct.
- Write in the active voice.
 - Do: The web team wrote this document.
 - Don't: This document was written by the web team.
- Use correct grammar. It is not necessary to use complete sentences in web writing, but it is essential to use correct grammar.

CMS Style Guide • Midwest Region

Link Titles – Defining a Link

Links should describe what the user would find at the linked page. Software that "reads" the link to a person with visual problems literally reads the words that are underlined.

- Do use: See the Visitor Center page for details.
- Don't use: Click here for the Visitor Center page for details.

Listing Links

Lists of links should appear in "sentence case" (first letter of first word capitalized and no other capitalization except for proper nouns, acronyms, abbreviations).

- Do use: See the policy page for details.
- Don't use: See The Policy Page For Details.

When using a list of links, list them in alphabetical order unless:

- Links intentionally follow chronological order, or
- Links intentionally lead the user through a logical sequence.

Journal of Wildlife Management Guidelines for biological names

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ABSTRACT These guidelines present *Journal of Wildlife Management (JWM)* policies and procedures for submitting, reviewing, and editing manuscripts. In 2007 peer-reviewed *Wildlife Society Bulletin (WSB)* articles were combined with *JWM* articles to form the new *JWM*. These guidelines address that transition and update the Guidelines of Block et al. 2007. Appendices are included for assistance in on-line submittal (Appendix A), literature cited (Appendix B), and required abbreviations (Appendix C).

Common and Scientific Names

- 519 Do not capitalize common names of species except words that are proper names (e.g., Canada)
- 520 goose, Swainson's hawk and white-tailed deer

Guidebooks and other Supplemental Documents

Guidebooks and other supplemental documents that you add to your website must be posted in PDF format or reformatted so they are web friendly. Print publications must follow the same approval processes of any other web document.

CMS Style Guide • Midwest Region

Content Review Checklist

When developing content for Service websites, be sure that the following is reviewed:

Clarity of Purpose:

- The purpose of the page is stated in the first paragraph
- Any "next steps" from the page are clearly identified

Tone and Voice:

- All acronyms are used only after the full term has been spelled out once with the acronym following it in parentheses. Consider each page of your website to be a new "mention"
- The text is written in the active voice
- Written content must be grammatically correct except for headings and bullets, which are sentence fragments

Content Organization and Consistency:

- Headers and sub-headers are used to break up content into manageable chunks
- Content is written in the inverted pyramid format with the most important information at the beginning, contextual information in middle, and supplementary information at the end
- Words and phrases throughout the site are consistent with the same meaning

Content Formats:

- Written content is clear and spelled correctly
- Print publications are in Adobe PDF format or are formatted to be web friendly.

Usage:

- See the [*United States Government Printing Office Style Manual*](#) for guidance - especially for:
 - Abbreviations and acronyms
 - Capitalization rules (for example when to use Federal or federal)
 - Compounding examples (when to use - or not use - hyphens)
 - Land descriptions, measurements, numbers, dates (when to spell out, when to use numerals)

CMS Style Guide • Midwest Region

Rule Sheet

The purpose of the Rule Sheet is to help field station content providers and web managers determine what content can and cannot be published on to Service websites.

In general, err on the side of caution when publishing Service content on a Service website.

When creating content on a Service website, field station content providers and web managers must review the rules below and consider: **Is this appropriate for our public or anyone with access to the internet?**

No Internal Service Documents or Work Instructions; do not include content about or reference any of the following:

- Work tools / toolkits (how to get your job done)
- Internal deployment schedules
- Internal policies, especially as relates to compensation and work performance
- Management / work processing instructions
- Supervisor / management / professional information
- Internal memos or letters, instead there must be an interpretation of the memo or letter content that can be shared with the public